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I am writing this letter in opposition of HB 5447, which could potentially limit the tuition a private special education school can charge for necessary special education services.

My son is now 17 and is in a private special education school. He was born with a severe congenital heart defect--basically he only has half of his heart. He's barely lived through his 4 open heart surgeries and spent many months on life support after each one.

At first he was in public school and it was obvious that he was falling behind. He had a stroke during one of his heart surgeries which affects the speed at which he processes information, so he can't keep up with the speed of normal conversation or instruction. He's been in a private special education school since he was 6 because we pulled him out of public school. The public school system is not set up for children like him. He has a severe hearing loss from medications he was given at Yale to keep him alive. He has a paralyzed vocal cord which resulted from the heart surgeon cutting the vocal nerve during one of his open heart surgeries. These conditions make it difficult for him to hear in a typical classroom, even with hearing aids, and it is hard for the teacher or those in the class to hear him when speaks, so in a large public school classroom, communication is almost impossible for him.

He also struggles with endurance, both on a listening level and on a physical level because of his heart. Smaller schools and smaller classrooms with frequent breaks help him make it through the day in a productive manner. He is provided this kinds of accommodations in a smaller private school. He receives much more individualized instruction in a private school, and he has friends with whom he can relate because they are also students with disabilities and learning issues.

My son can not function in a mainstream public high school yet he is excelling at a small private school. He is learning independent living skills and because of the individual attention he has received in these small classes with student teacher ratio of 1:5, he is now on track for taking pre college courses this coming fall. He has been able to gain the confidence it takes to earn his driver's license, and he has a small part time job on weekends. He aspires to work in technology and his school has a partnership with local business that will offer him the training and skills he needs to pursue his dream.

My son is a child with a severe disability who would have otherwise been a "burden" to society. He could have easily learned to be helpless and accept state disability funds instead of working. Yet because of the private schools he has been in thus far, and the way they have taught him to go beyond his limitations, he is an independent, able young man with aspirations to remain independent long after his parents are gone.

Please oppose this bill, as setting rates will limit the services a private school can provide.